

Press release: Avian Flu measures to be relaxed in England from 15 May

Measures currently in place to reduce the risk of Avian Influenza in England will be lifted from 15 May 2017 following the latest risk assessment from Defra, the UK Chief Veterinary Officer has announced.

The [Avian Influenza Prevention Zone \(AIPZ\)](#) currently in place will be lifted in England on 15 May 2017. From this date, keepers will no longer be required by law to follow specific disease prevention measures to reduce the risk of infection from wild birds. They should continue to follow industry standard best practice on biosecurity, including minimising movement in and out of bird enclosures, cleaning footwear, keeping areas where birds live clean and tidy and feeding birds indoors.

A [ban on poultry gatherings](#) has been in place since 20 December to reduce the risk of infected poultry passing the virus to other birds. This ban will be lifted in England on 15 May 2017, meaning bird gatherings can then resume, subject to some additional identity and health checks and biosecurity measures.

The Government continually reviews disease control measures in light of new scientific evidence and veterinary advice. The [latest assessment from Defra](#) is that the overall risk in England has fallen from 'medium' to 'low', comparable with risk levels in November 2016, and should continue to fall in warmer, drier spring weather conditions.

Based on this assessment, the decision has been taken to lift measures on 15 May, provided there are no further cases in poultry or findings of H5N8 in wild birds.

The most recent case of H5N8 in poultry in England was confirmed on 24 February 2017 and the last finding in wild birds was on 10 March 2017.

Further information

- Confidence that the risk has fallen sufficiently to lift the remaining statutory disease control measures will have increased further by 15 May if there are no more cases in domestic poultry, including those now returned to free range and thus at highest risk, or findings in wild birds. In parallel the risk from residual infection in the environment will continue to reduce as higher temperatures and light levels and drier conditions accelerate the inactivation of the virus. [Read the latest risk assessment](#).
- Members of the public should report dead wild birds – such as swans, geese, ducks, gulls or birds of prey – to the Defra helpline on 03459 33 55 77. Defra will then collect some of these birds and test them to help

us understand how the disease is distributed geographically and in different types of bird.

- Public Health England advises the risk to public health is very low and the Food Standards Agency has said there is no food safety risk for UK consumers.
- [Find out more about avian flu.](#)

Press release: Northern Ireland Act 2017 receives Royal Assent

The Act sets a Regional Rate for Northern Ireland in 2017-18 and allows an Executive to be formed before the 29 June deadline.

The Northern Ireland (Ministerial Appointments and Regional Rates) Act 2017, introduced by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland last week, has today received Royal Assent.

The [Act](#) sets a Regional Rate for Northern Ireland in 2017-18, removes a legal barrier to the formation of an Executive and provides an extension to the period in which a new Executive could be formed.

Welcoming the news, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt. Hon. James Brokenshire MP, said:

This legislation provides the flexibility for an incoming Government to act in the best interests of Northern Ireland and the space for an Executive to be formed before the 29 June deadline.

All the parties involved recognise it is vital that devolved government, and all of the institutions established under the Belfast Agreement and its successors, resumes in Northern Ireland as soon as possible.

News story: Criminal Finances Bill receives Royal Assent

The Criminal Finances Act 2017 will give law enforcement agencies and partners, further capabilities and powers to recover the proceeds of crime, tackle money laundering, tax evasion and corruption, and combat the financing of terrorism.

The act:

- creates unexplained wealth orders which can require those suspected of serious crime or corruption to explain the sources of their wealth
- creates new criminal offences for corporations who fail to prevent their staff from facilitating tax evasion
- enables the seizure and forfeiture of proceeds of crime and terrorist money stored in bank accounts and certain personal or moveable items
- provides legal protections for the sharing of information between regulated companies and extends the time period granted to law enforcement agencies to investigate suspicious transactions
- extends disclosure orders to cover money laundering and terrorist finance investigations
- extends the existing civil recovery regime in the Proceeds of Crime Act to allow for the recovery of the proceeds of gross human rights abuses or violations overseas

Press release: Digital Economy Bill receives Royal Assent

The Bill introduces measures to modernise the UK for enterprise. The measures have been designed to:

- empower consumers and ensure everyone has access to broadband wherever they live
- build a better infrastructure fit for the digital future
- enable better public services using digital technologies
- provide important protections for citizens from spam email and nuisance calls and protect children from online pornography

Minister of State for Digital and Culture, Matt Hancock said:

I'm delighted the Digital Economy Act has become law. This legislation will help build a more connected and stronger economy.

The Act will enable major improvements in broadband rollout, better support for consumers, better protection for children on the Internet, and further transformation of government services.

The Act includes provisions which will:

- give every household a legal right to request a fast broadband connection
- give consumers and businesses better information about communication services, easier switching and automatic compensation if things go wrong
- cut the costs for new infrastructure and simplify planning rules
- enable stronger enforcement of direct marketing laws
- create civil penalties for online pornographers who do not verify the age of their customers, and ISP level blocking of non-compliant sites, and;
- help protect consumers from “bill shock” by requiring mobile network operators to offer a bill capping facility

During the passage of the Bill through Parliament, a series of useful provisions have been added, including;

- powers to ensure that the Crown guarantee of BT pensions has the necessary flexibility to allow BT and Openreach to be separated
- powers to tackle the problem of “bots” in the online secondary ticketing market,
- an extension of the public lending right to cover e-books, and;
- provision to ensure that on-demand television is accessible to people with disabilities.

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ENDS

News story: National Citizen Service (NCS) Bill receives Royal Assent

The NCS Act will work alongside a Royal Charter for the National Citizen Service Trust.

The National Citizen Service Bill has today received Royal Assent.

Together the Act and Royal Charter are designed to make sure NCS is delivered efficiently, effectively and transparently.

The NCS programme brings young people from different backgrounds together and

gives them the opportunity to take part in new experiences, develop skills and volunteer in communities across England.

The Act:

- Enables the staff and assets of the NCS Trust to transfer to a Royal Charter Body
- Allows government to provide grant-in-aid funding to the NCS Trust
- Requires the NCS Trust to publish a business plan at the start of each year and produce annual accounts and an Annual Report, ensuring accountability and transparency
- Makes the National Audit Office the auditor of the NCS Trust
- Promotes NCS by giving Government the power to send a letter to young people as they turn 16 on behalf of the NCS Trust

Rob Wilson, Minister for Civil Society, said:

I am pleased that the Bill has received Royal Assent. Many young people value NCS so it is important the programme is delivered well with realistic measurable targets, proper transparency and accountability. This Act will do that.

The [NCS](#) runs in spring, summer and autumn and helps build skills for work and life, while inviting participants to take on new challenges and meet new friends.

The NCS Trust was originally established as a Community Interest Company – a social enterprise that has the status of a company but with the aim of working for the benefit of the community – the act now enables the transition to a Royal Charter Body.